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THE SOCIAL PRAYER-MEETING.

“Again I say unto you,—That if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”—Mat. xviii. 19, 20.

In the hour of distress we naturally seek relief. The least we can do is to ask help of any who have the means of giving us aid. If God only can relieve us, the same feeling prompts us to ask or seek his assistance;—to present ourselves before the mercy-seat of an all-hearing God, and humbly request him to consider our case, and give us help in our time of need.

To pray, therefore, is but to act in accordance with the unconstrained operations of our sinful and needy souls; it is but to deal with God, in whom we live, and move, and have our being, as with those of our fellow-beings on whom we are dependent. It is more incumbent, then, on those who deny the propriety and usefulness of prayer, to show why we should not pray, than for us who maintain the duty to show why men ought always to pray and not to faint.

Mutual wants and common griefs prompt to the union of the needy and sorrowing in drawing nigh to God. All human experience testifies that it is not enough to pray alone. “It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying,—Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord of hosts; I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord.” The prophet in this passage does but express what has a thousand times taken place in every age of the Church. But why this desire for the presence and agreement of others—of many others, in the presentation of prayer? Why not each for himself be content to pray at home, and in the secret place where none but God can hear?

That mankind have ever felt that secret supplication, intercession, and giving of thanks, though indispensable alike to piety and its cultivation, are not enough, and that peculiar advantages attend the offering of united prayer, is clearly to be seen in their practice. There never

has been a time, since the Almighty said,—“It is not good that the man should be alone,” when social prayer has not been addressed to the Most High,—a time, when men have not been wont to come one to another, and say,—“Let us go to pray before the Lord of hosts.”

Social prayer, therefore, as well as the lone prayer of the closet, it will be seen; is one of the promptings of human nature; felt, as all history teaches, in all climes, kindreds and generations. To neglect, withhold, and restrain such prayer, is to act contrary to the convictions,—the sober, long-cherished and fully-established convictions,—of every age, and of all the world.

To those convictions the Saviour of the world affixed his seal. He himself prayed both in secret and in company with others. What he encouraged and commended by his example, he also enforced with exhortations and promises. More explicit, unequivocal, and positive promises, cannot be framed than those which fell from his lips in relation to prayer. “Pray to thy Father, and thy Father shall reward thee openly.” “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” “And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.” “And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” “What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do.” “If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.” “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” “Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.” “Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”

All these declarations of the Son of God are plain and direct. Whatever else they do or do not teach, of one thing they assure us beyond all question,—God will hear and answer when we pray; we never pray in vain. Doubt anything else sooner than this. Deny every other doctrine of the Bible, or admit this; for no other is more abundantly confirmed. Question your own humanity, your own natural affection, sooner;—“If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” Such an appeal should silence every doubt.

It was thus that he, who “is in the bosom of the Father,” discoursed of prayer. And what he taught he practised:—

“Cold mountains, and the midnight air,
Witnessed the fervor of his prayer.”

Much of what he said in relation to this exercise related, no doubt, to secret prayer—the praying of an individual by himself. But no small part of it, especially those promises that are recorded by the beloved John, has an obvious reference to united, social, public prayer. Such

is the reference, it will be seen, in the text:—"If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask."

The language of the text is worthy of special consideration. It presents an additional feature in respect to prayer,—a new fact, a particular promise. The Saviour had already, in the plainest terms and most explicit manner possible, reiterated, confirmed and established the ancient promises which had served, in former days, as the basis of the believer's faith in prayer. The disciples, therefore, needed not any additional assurance that their individual prayers would be heard in heaven and avail with God. On this point no room for doubt was left. They needed, however, an additional lesson in the doctrine of prayer.

Advancing from his former position, the great Teacher now takes still higher ground. He proceeds to inform them of the peculiar efficacy of union in prayer; to teach them that the united prayer of any two of them has an efficacy much superior to that of the lone prayer of any one of them; that such a presentation of united desire has, not only the combined power that each suppliant would have with God, if he prayed alone, but an additional and peculiar power resulting from this very combination of hearts in the utterance of the same request. Just as there is greater power in a heap of living coals, than in the sum of the whole when each is detached from the other.

Nor is this additional feature of the doctrine removed or impaired by insisting, as many do, that the language of the Saviour in this passage is to be referred and limited to the twelve and to their ecclesiastical canons, sanctions and censures. Even in this restricted application of the words,—an application derived more from the juxta-position of the text, than from the declaration itself, which seems to include a general principle of the divine procedure,—it is yet most clearly taught, that the united prayer of any two of the twelve would have an efficacy greater than the sum of the efficacy of the prayer of each if offered separately. "How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight," except on this principle?

The doctrine, therefore, that is taught in these words of our Lord, is plainly this:—*That any number of praying souls, two or more, have much greater reason to expect success when they pray together than when they pray for the same thing separately.* Blessed promises, "exceedingly great and precious," are, it is true, addressed to those who pray in secret; but greater and more glorious results may be expected from the social offering of prayer by any two or more of the disciples of Christ. This is the grand truth which, in this discourse, it is proposed to illustrate and commend.

The particular reason presented by our Saviour for this superior efficacy of social prayer is to this effect:—"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, *there am I* in the midst of them." Such a meeting, for such a purpose, is sure to attract the presence, the sympathy, and co-operation of the great Redeemer himself;—sure to interest him in the matter prayed for, and to secure his joint-intercession for the desired blessing. When Jesus himself makes one of the

praying company, as he often did when on earth,—when he, who “ever liveth to make intercession for them” who love him, mingles his supplications with the petitions of any twain of us,—when he bows down, as it were, with us at the mercy-seat,—what wonder is it, that the thing for which we ask is done for us of our Father in heaven ?

It may now be seen on which principle it is that social prayer has a peculiar efficacy above secret prayer; not indeed where the latter is neglected; but when we go from the latter to the former; when, having offered in its season the sacrifice of the closet, we go, still breathing the atmosphere that we have inhaled by communing with God in secret, to the place where prayer—united prayer—is “wont to be made.” Thus we gather to ourselves the aid of as many as come together, each privileged for himself to plead all the promises, and throwing all their resources into a common fund with which to effect their desired object; and not only their aid, but the presence, countenance, support, and joint-intercession of one who is “worth ten thousand of us,” and “ten thousand times ten thousand,”—one who alone and infinitely is worthy,—one who can never pray in vain,—one who has only to ask and the treasure-house of heaven is thrown open to him. “Thinkest thou,” said he to his disciples, “that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?”

Yes, in a peculiar manner, and as he is not with the secret suppliant, Christ is present and mingles with an assembly of his disciples, however small; be they but two in number, the least that can constitute an assembly. This, his peculiar presence, sanctifies both the altar and the gift,—the place of prayer and the prayer itself. For, when thus present, it is not in the character of an unconcerned spectator, or merely of a sympathizing friend; but, as the most concerned and interested of the company, to lead them, as he was wont to do when in the body, to the throne of the heavenly grace, to the mercy-seat, and to him that “sitteth between the cherubims,” and to offer for them “the effectual fervent prayer” of him who alone is righteous. It cannot but be, therefore, that peculiar efficacy should pertain to the prayer which proceeds, at one time and place, from the hearts and lips of the people of God.

In further illustration of this fact, appeal may be made

I. To the prevalence of social prayer among men.

It has already been observed that social prayer has, in every age, been the resort, in time of need, of our sinful and perishing race. Wherever God has been known and worshipped, united prayer has constituted a part—a principal part—of that worship. Where, too, in their blindness and folly, men have “changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator,” where they have “changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things”—to these their idols they have appealed

for help with all the supposed power of union in prayer. The conviction of the world has ever been, that such prayer, not only is a proper way in which to worship the Creator, but has a remarkable superiority over prayer in secret.

Whether this universal fact may be regarded as the result of an original dictate of man's nature—of a feeling growing out of his original constitution,—or as the consequence of an early revelation of the divine will preserved by a common tradition among all nations,—it shows beyond a question that the experience of every age and generation has confirmed the position that social prayer has a value peculiar to itself; that there are blessings, the bestowment of which can be secured in this and in no other way, or better thus than by other means.

The appeal may also be made

II. *To the experience of those who neglect social prayer.*

It is in accordance with invariable experience, that in order to preserve the power of religion the form thereof must be sustained. The form, it is true, may and often does exist without the power; but the power is never found without "the form of godliness." Consequently, whenever men have neglected and abandoned the practice of social prayer, their religion has first degenerated, and then dwindled away, until it ceased to have even

"A local habitation and a name."

This fact is particularly observable in communities of small extent, such as are found in towns and villages. Let the practice, in any such community, of assembling together for united prayer be for any cause suspended, and at length entirely discontinued for years and generations, and it is no difficult thing to foretell the consequences to the religion and morals of that community. Sad and deplorable evidences enough can be found, that in such cases, with the neglect of social prayer, religion has departed, errors of the most glaring and disastrous character have crept in and stalk abroad at noon day, while vice grows up and flourishes like weeds in the garden of the sluggard.

All this we know to have resulted from the neglect of what is called *public prayer or worship*, which is social prayer in its most enlarged form. Similar consequences flow, as might be shown, from the neglect of *household prayer*, in which the social character is still retained, but in a limited form.

There is, however, another form of social prayer, occupying a middle ground between public and household prayer; neither so restricted as the one, nor so extended as the other;—a form which is ordinarily distinguished as social prayer. An assemblage for such a purpose is, by way of farther distinction, commonly called a *prayer-meeting*. Such assemblages are not confined to the Lord's day, as those for public worship ordinarily are; nor are they held only in the sanctuary. The whole, or a part of a church, or neighborhood, may come together, in any convenient place,—a lecture-room, a vestry, a parlor, a cabin, or

“an upper chamber,”—on any day or evening of the week, for the avowed purpose of continuing an hour or two in united prayer. So did they in the days of the Apostles, and so were they assembled, some of the early Christians, on the memorable occasion of Peter’s deliverance from the prison and the sword.

To such meetings the language of the text has a most manifest and particular application, as may be seen from the sad experience of those churches and Christians who are strangers to such meetings. Show me a church of any name, in any part of the world, who have always, or for many years, contented themselves with the assembling of themselves together for public worship once or twice on the Lord’s day; who are never seen at other times gathering to their solemn meeting; who never, when two or three have come together, bow themselves down at the mercy-seat; who are never heard presenting the voice of united prayer in social circles;—and I will show you a church where revivals of religion are unknown and undesired; where individual cases of conversion seldom or never occur; where the waters of life stagnate; where the fire on the altar is almost quenched; where the heavens are brass and the earth iron; a church, whose dwelling-place is in the top of Gilboa, or on “a heath in the desert;” and who can scarcely be distinguished from the very lovers of this world.

Or, if such churches cannot be found, show me a church among whom one or more weekly meetings for prayer have been set up, either for males or females, or both; but where not one in ten or twenty of their number is ever seen in the place of prayer; and of those who come, a large part; perhaps, are occasional visitants; where but few and infrequent means are used to induce the church to attend, or if used are ineffectual; where prayer-meetings are set up only to languish and die;—and I need not tell you what is the spiritual state and prospects of that people; you know already. There the ambassador of Christ, if he be what a herald of the cross ever should be, is often heard to cry—“Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” It would be presumptuous in the extreme to expect to find a revival of religion or a refreshing from the presence of the Lord in such a church. “Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?” So uniform are these consequences, that the prayer-meeting is ordinarily regarded as the spiritual thermometer of the church.

Once more: take the case of an individual who is connected with the Church, and dwells among a people where such means of grace are afforded him, but who, though frequently invited and urged to associate in such exercises with “the praying few,” finds neither time nor inclination to be present and participate in the duties and privileges of such an occasion. Such a Christian professor may possibly be found among them whom I now address. Yes—I have one even now in my eye. “Thou art the man!” Let me ask thee, why is it that thou canst never find time for the weekly exercise of social prayer? How is it that the appointed season always finds thee so busily occupied with other concerns? When have I seen thee in a prayer-

meeting? Alas! it is, "long—long ago!" Seldom hast thou ever been heard to open thy lips in prayer. And what now is the character of thy religion? what the state of thy heart? Shall I tear away the veil that hides it from the eyes of mortals? Shall I penetrate its dark chambers, explore its deep and gloomy recesses, and draw a picture of its wretched condition? This would but expose you before the world, and I am loth to do it. God knows it all, and not a little of it thou knowest thyself. Thou knowest full well that it is by no means with thee as in months and years that are past. With thyself and with thy God I leave thee.

But let me ask, did ever a Christian become at all distinguished for piety, who had no place, nor desire for a place, in the social praying circle? Show me the man. I have never seen him. Or is there one whom I now address, who walks with God daily, and always, or for the most part, has delightful fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ—one who is growing in grace and ripening for heaven, who, at the same time, never or seldom accompanies his Redeemer, nor desires to accompany him, to the place where two or more are met together in the name of Christ for united prayer? But why do I ask? How vain the thought! Who for one moment would undertake, or think of, such a fruitless search?

Let me, however, direct attention to yet another class. There are those, perhaps, who now hear me, to whom this subject has brought many painful recollections. You were once among the number who came to the place of prayer, bowed down with the lowly band before the throne of grace, lifted up your voices in the midst of your brethren and sisters, and poured out your hearts in fervent supplication unto him who heareth prayer. For a season you, too, "did run well." But that season was short. Months have passed away, and we have looked for you at the appointed time and place, but you were not to be seen. Surely, we have said, after such an appeal as he heard on the Sabbath, after so much entreaty and urgency on the part of the pastor, surely he will come this evening. But the evening came, and our hearts sunk within us when we found that your place was still vacant; that you could not be seen even lingering about the door. Need I call you by name? Not at all; it is well known. The eyes of your brethren and sisters are on you; and what is more, the all-seeing eye is also on you. Your God and Saviour too has looked for you, and you came not. When our hearts have felt his presence, and overflowed with streams of bliss, we have wished for you, but wished in vain.

And now suffer me to ask—not what has prevented your attendance, and repressed your desire—but is it better with you, than when you would sooner offend all your kindred than fail to keep your engagement with the Saviour at the hour and place for the weekly prayer-meeting? better than when you would as soon make an engagement for worldly business or pleasure on the Lord's Day, as on the evening consecrated to social prayer? Better? Alas! how art thou fallen! scarcely canst

thou recognize thy former self. Is this he who once so breathed the atmosphere of Heaven in his interviews with God, that his very countenance shone as he came down from the mount, and his garments were filled with the rich perfume ?

“ When one, that holds communion with the skies,
Has filled his urn where these pure waters rise,
And once more mingles with us, meaner things,
'Tis e'en as if an angel shook his wings :
Immortal fragrance fills the circuit wide,
That tells us whence his treasures are supplied.”

So was it with thee, poor wanderer ! Such was the fragrance of those happy seasons when the world was far away, and heaven was brought down to the earth. But what a mere skeleton hast thou now become ! What an image art thou of living death ! “ How is the gold become dim, how is the most fine gold changed ! ” Would that I could persuade thee to come and, like the prodigal, deplore thy folly in leaving thy Father's house ! Why longer stay away to starve and perish ? Believe me, thou canst never thrive on husks ; canst never again experience the bliss of former days, until thy feet are once more led, with a longing heart, to the place where Jesus is—the place where he makes one of a praying circle in mutual sympathy and intercession.

Bear with me, if I seem to be urgent. “ The love of Christ constraineth ” me. I am in earnest. I am distressed for you who are impoverishing your souls. I am anxious—greatly anxious—that it should be with each of you as once it was. I have one request to make of you. Will you not grant it ? It will cost you nothing. You can comply, I doubt not, if you will. Your brethren and sisters—a few of them at least—are wont to meet at a specified hour and place every week, to pray for the out-pouring of the spirit and the prosperity of Zion. Will each of you be present, God willing, at the next meeting ? The Master has said—“ where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them.” Christ will be there, for he will keep his word for ever. Will you be there ?—No ? can you say it ? Not even to meet Christ there ? Not even to honor him with your presence ? Not even to obtain of him the desire of your heart ?

What aileth thee, friend ? Must Jesus stand begging with thee, day after day, and be denied after all ? Dost thou believe or not what he tells thee in the text ? If thou dost not believe his word, what dost thou but give him the lie ? Thou makest thy God a liar ! Either thou dost not believe that Christ will be present in deed and in truth, or dost not care for his company. If thou lovest him, then to be where he is,

“ Is sweeter than ten thousand days
Of pleasurable sin.”

Then if thou dost believe his word, thou canst not stay away. Everything will be laid aside, and time redeemed, to have such an interview

with Christ. If it be, however, thy choice to stay away, then say not—"Lord!—thou knowest that I love thee."

But we may appeal also, and with great confidence,

III. *To their experience who faithfully improve their opportunities of Social Prayer.*

That the Saviour himself delighted in this heavenly exercise can be doubted not at all. He and his disciples, with others of a kindred spirit, often had their prayer-meetings. Frequently when two or three of those who loved him, trusting in the memorable words of the text, had met together, and were seeking the consolation of Israel, the Lord, whom they sought, would suddenly and unexpectedly come in, and, bowing down with them at the mercy-seat, give an inexpressible interest to their meeting.

At times he would take two or three of them aside from the rest, and when by themselves engage with them in exercises of devotion. On one occasion he expressed, to Peter and James and John, his desire for their company and participation in this heavenly privilege. He would go forth to a retired spot and pray; and these his bosom-friends he would have with him. They arrive at the place, sequestered from the observation of the world, and shut in by the covert, perhaps, of a grateful grove of olives. There, on the mountain-side, they bow down together, and Jesus prays. The longer he continues in the delightful employment, the more he seems to partake of the spirit, and to breathe the atmosphere of heaven; so much so, that presently his whole form becomes radiant with the light of the upper world, and heaven is brought down to the earth. And with the light of heaven came two of its glorified inhabitants;—Moses, the great lawgiver, and Elijah, the great prophet of Israel. It seemed but a step that day from earth to heaven. Had Jacob been there, he would have exclaimed, as with far less reason at Bethel—"This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." As it was, however—such was the inspiration of the occasion, Peter said to his Saviour—"Lord! it is good for us to be here; if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles."

Yes, it is good to be where Christ is, and in the praying circle. Experience is the best evidence. Taste and see. Ask them who have put the social prayer-meeting to the proof, and they can tell. "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." Our testimony is—that they who faithfully improve their opportunities of social prayer, other things being equal, experience more sweet and pure delight in the very exercise; grow more rapidly and steadily in grace; become the most devotional, active and useful Christians; constitute, in fact, the life and soul of the Church; and, finally, that to them more than to all other human means, are we indebted for showers of divine grace and abundant harvests of spiritual blessings.

1. *They experience more sweet and pure delight in the very exercise.*
—See this exemplified in the case of a young convert. The prayer-

meeting is the delight of a new-born soul. That which creates delight will be sought again and again. Conscious of the happiness thus afforded, the soul instinctively desires a renewal of the gratification. One who has just been truly converted to God needs no entreaty to engage in the exercise of social devotion. Every opportunity is eagerly embraced.

Recall, fellow-Christian! the days of your own spiritual childhood. With what eagerness was the occasion embraced that gave you an opportunity of such spiritual communion! Were you busily occupied at the time with the cares of the world? They were felt to be a grievous burden, because they interfered with the gratification of this longing desire to be one of the "two or three." Were you pressingly occupied with household affairs? How were the labors of the evening anticipated and put out of the way, that you might have leisure to meet your brethren and sisters "where prayer is wont to be made!" And, when a kind Providence afforded you the gratification, with what emphasis could you say—"Lord! it is good for us to be here!" How sweet the peace—how pure the delight—how full, even to overflowing, the grateful heart, as you bowed before the Lord, as you sung the praises of your glorified Redeemer! These are among the most pleasant remembrances of your whole spiritual history. It was a real joy, an unfeigned and satisfying delight. Those were "spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," for which you could not be too grateful. And, when the short hour of prayer had passed, did you not go away from the much-loved spot with a renewed relish for the service of God, with a livelier gratitude for the grace of regeneration, and with more ardent anticipations of another such season of pure enjoyment? I need not ask. There can be but one answer to these questions.

Let me refer also to those seasons of grace when God pours out his Holy Spirit, and the Church is refreshed with frequent showers of divine grace. Then, if ever, spiritual affections and apprehensions are lively; then the renewed heart longs for, and can be satisfied with nothing short of, a real, rational and rich spiritual feast. Baser pleasures no longer please. Worldly gratifications are no longer desired, but regarded even with disgust. Led by the Spirit, the soul of the Christian seeks those places of resort, where its keen and purified appetite for heavenly joys can be gratified to the full. Under this guidance, and impelled by this desire, mindful of former joys, and conscious of the delight afforded by the very thoughts of such a meeting, the Christian hastes to the place of prayer. From "all the dwellings of Jacob" they come up at the appointed hour and crowd the place. Many, who have long absented themselves, by reason of their lukewarmness or coldness, now with eager haste are seen flocking together, evening after evening, and week after week, as though they could not be satiated with such delights.

"They drink, and drink, and drink again,
And yet they still are dry."

Such, beloved in the Lord! has been your experience again and

again. You can add your testimony, I know, to that of thousands in all parts of the Lord's heritage, that the more you engage in such exercises of devotion, the more you delight in them and desire them. When, in the providence of God, you are separated for a season from the place of prayer, it is felt to be a hardship indeed. If laid on a bed of sickness, or confined to your dwelling by a lingering and debilitating disease, the place and hour of social prayer is not, cannot be forgotten. If you have been called to take up your abode temporarily or permanently at a place remote from such opportunities, how often do you feel constrained to say—"Oh that I could once more enjoy those blessed prayer-meetings!" Said one to me a short time since—"There is nothing that makes me feel that I have gone from home so much as those prayer-meetings." And this testimony is repeated over and over again. It shows what are the honest convictions of God's dear children, how great has been their sense of enjoyment in such gatherings, and how much they are to be prized as affording the means of greatly increasing one's spiritual gratification.

2. *They grow more rapidly and steadily in grace.*—"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint." If this is true, as every Christian knows, of secret prayer, it is no less true of social worship, as a great "cloud of witnesses" can testify. Too frequently the course of the believer is like the waves of the sea in their undulations, but not in their progress. Now he is all life, and presently he seems scarcely to breathe. Now he advances with a rapid step, and seems as if he would take heaven itself by storm, and then he is borne onward and downward by the current of worldliness.

There are some, however, who evidently, even in times of great degeneracy, are making steady progress in their journey to the New Jerusalem; whose graces are becoming more and more perfectly developed; whose principles are gaining depth and strength, and who are daily learning more and more of their own hearts and of the riches of grace that are treasured up in Christ Jesus, their Lord. To any of these you may go, and learn how the prayer-meeting is attended. They can tell you, for they are always there, unless an evident providence prevent. Their growth in grace not only prompts them to seek the place of prayer, but is itself in part, and so they feel it to be, a result of frequent attendance there.

Has there ever been a time, my brother! when every week you were accustomed to attend one or more prayer-meetings, and when you endeavored faithfully to improve these means of grace? Are you not convinced that that was a season, not only of high spiritual enjoyment, but of evident and great advance "in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ?" And this because you were then brought under such influences as served to dispel the darkness, dissipate the mist, and give clearness to your spiritual vision, as also to promote the growth

and strength of all the members of the spiritual body. So has it ever been with all who have fairly made this experiment.

3. *They become the most devotional, active and useful Christians.*—How could it be otherwise! They who most and best grow in grace are sure, as a matter of course, to be the most devotional. They carry away with them, from the place of prayer, such a love for prayer as sends them again and again to their closet and makes the flames of devotion burn brighter on the household altar. This spirit, moreover, accompanies them in, and gives character, to their daily walk and conversation. So much is this the case, that the contrast between them and other members of the Church is perceived, not only by those whose spiritual senses are highly cultivated, but by the ungodly world, who are constrained to take “knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus.”

Animated by this spirit of devotion they become, of course, more active in every duty. They are actuated by a living principle. They cannot be so much and so often with their divine Lord, and not partake of his spirit. From communion with him in the place where he is pledged to be present, they derive a lively zeal for doing good. This zeal shows itself in frequent and earnest exertions to bring others to be partakers of their joy. Their fellow-Christians feel the influence of such an example, and are humbled on account of their own deficiency. The unconverted feel it, and are brought to bow with them as they seek the grace of salvation. Thus their activity is of great use to the Church, and their success in doing good—the secret of which may to some extent be learned at the prayer-meeting—prompts others to go and do likewise.

4. *Hence they become the life and soul, as it were, of the Church.*—To put this matter to the test, let us suppose, that, by some remarkable providence, those who are accustomed to attend the meeting for social prayer were taken away from us, separated from their brethren by a removal to some distant place or to a better world, and their places left vacant. What, I ask, would become of the Church? There might be five, or even ten or twenty times as many professors remaining, and the public assembly on the Lord’s Day but little diminished; the body might still be there, but where would be the soul! where the pastor’s stay and comfort? where the upholders of his hands? where the spiritual life and prosperity of the Church? Alas! I tremble to think of the fatal consequences. God spare to us our praying brethren and sisters!—spare that precious band of believers, who, in summer and in winter, in the clear star-light and in the storm, in revivals and in the season of coldness, are seen gathering, true as the magnet to the pole, to the place of social prayer. Let him take away our wealth, our men of learning and distinction in society—let him take what he will, but Oh, that he would spare us, however poor and obscure they may be, our praying circle!

5. *I need but add, that to them more than all other human means, we are indebted for showers of divine grace.*—They are the representatives of that band of Christians, in answer to whose united prayers, in that “upper chamber” in Jerusalem, the promised Spirit came on the memorable day of Pentecost. And every subsequent revival of religion, it might easily be shown, has, with scarcely an exception, been connected with some such gathering. What pastor, in these days, ever hopes to see his people thus blest, except in connection with such means of grace? Where can the Church be found, on whom God is wont to pour out his Holy Spirit, who know nothing of prayer-meetings? If ever there was a matter placed beyond a doubt, it is that the social prayer-meeting is indispensable to the spiritual prosperity of the Church. But for those, then, who love and frequent these meetings, the churches would soon become “like a heath in the desert.”

IN CONCLUSION, I cannot forbear asking,

(1.) If there be any truth in the promise of our text, why is it that prayer-meetings are so neglected? Why is it that in many churches not more than one in every eight or ten can be persuaded to become habitual attendants upon this social service? Let every Christian answer it to his Saviour.

(2.) What blessings might not be expected, if but one half of every church would steadily and heartily engage in this neglected exercise? What a vast increase of spiritual-mindedness would ensue? what an emancipation of the Church from the bondage of the world? what an increase in the number and power of revivals of religion? what an impulse to every good work?

(3.) Can you bear the immense and fearful responsibility of preventing all this good? Can any of you bear it? If all were to do as you do, what would become of the Church? Will you, from this time, remember that Jesus is to be found in the prayer-meeting, and strive to be there yourself? Or, if you have no desire to be with Christ, will you give up your hope?